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"When an ordinary kid was collecting baseball cards, I was collecting movie star photographs," says Anger (in his living room/museum).

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THE LOOK BACK OF ANGER

In a steamy new book an ex-"Hollywood Baby" trashes movieland idols for fun and profit

by Michael Ryan

Sunk in a red velour armchair, in a room the color of blood, with a frosted vase of bird of paradise flowers and a bust of Rudolph Valentino peering over his shoulder, Kenneth Anger is letting his outrage show: "I went to see *Gremlins* last summer and *Ghostbusters* because I wanted to see what was drawing all the kiddies." He exaggerates the last word of each clause, as bachelor gentlemen of refined sensibilities often do. "I think they're both unsuitable for children, *frankly.* I may be old-fashioned, but a lot of the things that young children are exposed to today in the movies—*well,* it's not just like watching Mommy and Daddy make out. It's the violence. Hollywood used to represent death in black and white movies with a thin trickle of chocolate syrup, not all this blood. It's just a matter of *taste.*"

There could be no stranger setting for a disquisition on the morality of movies and no stranger arbiter of taste than Kenneth Anger, who has set tongues wagging from coast to coast with the publication of his *Hollywood Babylon II,* a sometimes shocking and instantly popular concatenation of Tinseltown gossip and compromising candid photos of the stars. To a generation that may not remember him as a child actor—or as an underground director whose *Scorpio Rising* was once shown in just about every art theater and college film series in America—Anger has introduced himself as a one-man wrecking crew of movie idols. Yet his book, Anger takes pains to insist, is a labor of—more or less—love. Says he, "Hollywood is one of the few places in the world that has an indestructible mythology."

No thanks to Anger. The book's five-year-old photographs of a grotesquely overweight Liz Taylor are among the unkindest cuts of all time; the picture of Marilyn Monroe's deathbed is simply ghoulish. Like a malevolent imp, Anger has sat on the sidelines of Hollywood for most of his 52 years, collecting nasty trivia and brutal images of the peo-

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PHOTOTEQUE (2)

Anger stays mum about this 1935 photo of Randolph Scott (left) and Cary Grant.

It's not what you think: Van Johnson (left) and Bob Cummings were camping at a 1951 roast.

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Shelley Winters and Tony Franciosa carried a 1957 fight into the stationhouse in L.A.

This 1960 shot caught Marlon Brando in a ridiculous pose; Anger says that worse exist.

Gloria Swanson, Anger unsurprisingly reports, went head over heels for Joe Kennedy.

Zero Mostel seems preoccupied with Shirley Temple in this 1950s paparazzi candid.

ple much of the world worships. Here we find that Alfred Hitchcock was a sadomasochist, and that Jane Wyman left Ronald Reagan because he repeatedly bored her—and their friends—by screening his star turn in *King's Row* after every dinner party.

Anger professes—with the piety of every good gossip—that "Nine-tenths of the people in Hollywood are straight arrows." But they go unsung—indeed, unmentioned—in a book that bears witness to its author's lifelong obsession with the seamiest side of a seamy business. Some of the "revelations" are thin stuff: Anyone who draws breath must know that Louise Lasser was busted for cocaine possession. The juiciest material concerns stars long dead—and beyond access to libel lawyers. Carmen Miranda had secret compartments cut in her platform shoes to stash her cocaine; Tallulah Bankhead and Hattie McDaniel were a gay couple; James Dean was boorish, childish and homosexual—and he had pubic lice to boot. Too often the book takes a sniggering tone: In a chapter entitled "Odd Couples," Anger reprints a series of photographs of Cary Grant and Randolph Scott at the swimming pool and the breakfast table of the house he says they shared in Santa Monica. The text of the chapter—which is devoted to sexual relationships between improbable couples—makes no mention of either Scott or Grant. "That's on purpose," Anger concedes.

A $190-per-month fourth-floor walk-up on a marginal street on New York's far Upper East Side is home to Kenneth Anger now, a home he shares with posters of the likes of Lupe Velez and Gloria Swanson. In a sepulchral dark-blue chamber with a ceiling that sprouts conelike blue stalactites with ruby tips, portraits of Rudolph Valentino stare down from every wall at Anger's single bed. The author's grandmother, a Hollywood costume mistress, dressed Valentino in several of his movies, including *Son of the Sheik*. In a place of honor in the living room, behind a mannequin of a young boy that stands naked except for the kerchief that Anger wore in the Beverly Hills Boy Scouts, sits a box of Rudolph Valentino cigars. An old copy of LIFE with a cover story on Valentino adorns the entranceway. To this day, Anger is grieved at the ignominious end his hero met. "He's just buried in this *niche* in a wall," Anger laments. "There were plans for this wonderful mausoleum,

to be built by public subscription. Pola Negri was supposed to lead it. But it never happened." Anger becomes distrait at the thought of the master in that cold, cold wall.

The air is humid, the windows shut and the crimson blinds drawn against the light of day. The dim illumination in the room comes mainly from an electric RKO sign that, Anger explains, once hung on the marquee of Radio City Music Hall, and from a bulb-studded foil star that once adorned a nickelodeon movie house. Anger has undone the top buttons of his shirt. The tattoo across his chest peeks through: LUCIFER, written in block capitals that tabloids might use to announce the coming of a world war. "It was my nickname in the Navy," he explains. "I was in and out of the service. I don't like to talk about it."

But Anger will talk almost endlessly about Hollywood stars. The stories in this book (the original *Hollywood Babylon,* too hot to print in the U.S., was issued in Paris in 1960, and finally brought out here a decade ago) come from sources like detectives and butlers and from Anger's own observations. "I'm a sponge," he says. "I soak up everything." He proffers a wealth of unprintable scandal about living stars, and caps it with an astonishing photograph that seems to show a film legend performing what is usually referred to as an unnatural act. "I've got enough material for another book," he confides. "But I want to move on to something else.

"Every 10 years or so, I need to make some money, so I can preserve my independent lifestyle," Anger says. Standing in the dank entranceway to his tenement, Anger pauses for a moment. "I was attacked, right here, just a few years ago," he remembers. "There was a bunch of Irish kids that were attacking so-called members of the gay community. They hit me with a Budweiser bottle. The same kids were attacking men in Central Park and they attacked this famous tennis player who was just jogging through; he wasn't even gay. They hit him with a baseball bat and he never played tennis again. And they weren't even punished."

A listener begins to wonder. The athlete in question was a skater, not a tennis player. And the men who did it were caught; they were sentenced to prison. But those details are merely facts. And they do get in the way of one of Kenneth Anger's good stories. □

KEN GALENTE COLLECTION

Joan Crawford showed affection for a little friend: her 1945 *Mildred Pierce* Oscar.

"Gin blossoms" is what Anger calls the thicket of broken veins on the face of toper W.C. Fields.